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JÜRGEN OELKERS

NOHL, DURKHEIM, AND MEAD: THREE DIFFERENT TYPES OF “HISTORY OF EDUCATION”

ABSTRACT. Historiography of education is not only a question of construction but also of selection. In 19th century “history of education” was typically a genre of “great educators”, mostly male and only marginally female. This construct is influential up to now, at least in popular contexts of educational reasoning. The article discusses in the introductory section problems of selection of names and meanings within history of education, and then three types of historiographical writing that are not only concerned with “great educators” but have larger Philosophical impact. The first type is Herman Nohl’s history of German progressive education, the second one is Emile Durkheim’s history of Higher Education in France, and the third one is George Herbert Mead’s *Movements of Thought in 19th Century*. The article compares them and discusses their implications for further development of historical writing in education.

KEY WORDS: Historiography, history of philosophy of education, methodology of education

HISTORY OF EDUCATION AND THE PROCESS OF SELECTION

Education in the present is often been designed in *earlier* epochs and does not, therefore, have inherent power alone. Certainly, practice should help to shape the future, but theory has historical references that are supposed to be authoritative in designing the future. Education is thus bound normatively to its own history, in the sense that reference to particular authors and their works is supposed to provide justification for what is practiced today and what will be practiced tomorrow. Often, these are authors that not only produced literary works, but, at the same time, can refer to their own practice of education. For the most part, it is *this combination* of writings and practice that is the condition that lends the authors credibility – we can think of Pestalozzi, Fröbel, Leo Tolstoi, or Maria Montessori. What is seen as “exemplary”, however, are not only certain authors and their practices, but rather entire historical epochs.

A central point of orientation for today’s education is *progressive education* of the late 19th and earlier 20th centuries. This is held to be



the start of the “new education”, which is supposed to be the determining influence up to today and to which one must inevitably refer in almost every connection. This *Reformpädagogik* (reform pedagogy), as progressive, or child-centered, education is called in Germany, however, is not, simply, a historical fact. It is a historical construct of historiography. The historiography has compressed very many, very heterogeneous developments, events, and elements into *one* educational universe that supposedly emerged between 1880 and 1890 and persists on up to today. When “progressive education” is discussed, however, much more is being evoked than the assumed start of an epoch. As a rule, mentioning the epoch means that, at the same time, an entire historiographical myth is being taken into account.

This myth has four characteristics:

- emphasis on charismatic founding figures,
- a spirit of the “new”,
- connected with innovative practices, and
- educational movements that are named after their founders.

Most of the practices and movements that were founded have been forgotten today. Those that have survived are, in retrospect, given a high value through an interested historiography and idealized as an outstanding epoch. This is true, from for instance Nohl (2002) to Berube (1994) or Gauthier/Tardif (1996, p. 149ff.), who stand for an voluminous international literature that has determining influence.¹ Here, the epoch of progressive education is held to be a legitimate, and perhaps the only, source of today’s innovations, which in this way become fixed to their forerunners without consideration of the peculiarities of the historiography of education. The historiography is simply taken naively as a given. A particular version of the past serves thus to legitimize present and future, without being put to the test. The standard historiography of progressive education takes on exclusive interpretative power, and it is, at the same time, highly selective, even though the selection process has no rational basis.

An example will quickly illustrate the point. In 1934 an anthology by Trevor Blewitt called *The Modern Schools Handbook* was pub-

¹ In addition to the traditional body of literature, there is a growing historiography of education on the Internet. Many of the sites are connected with progressive education because it rouses the most interest. Only a few sites are scholarly, most of them just promote progressive education and thereby use the historiographical schema of “old” and “new” education. See for example: *Thèmes et figures de l’éducation nouvelle* <http://goelano.chez.tiscali.fr/3-Instuado/Educatonouvelle.htm>.

lished in London. The volume presents progressive education schools founded in England that were designed to be alternatives to the state school and its maxims. Some of the schools were founded in the late 19th century, others after World War I, all are called “new schools”. In the preface, the editor writes that the modern schools shared three features in common:

- they rejected the learning ideals of the conventional public school,
- laid emphasis on the natural needs of the child, and
- believed that through education, we can change the world (Blewitt, 1934, p. 9).

My point is not whether or not these assumptions are naïve, but rather how these schools and their ideas were handled *subsequently* – what survived in the educational memory and what did not. Radical education in England was not just a national movement; it can be demonstrated that many of the founding figures had international contacts and orientations. These figures were the headmasters or headmistresses of smaller and larger private schools, that are called “radical”. In the twenties radical schools caused a sensation among the public, for they aimed to realize something that was seen as impossible, namely, a liberal education that was based on the needs of the child.

Some of the better-known figures on this scene were:

- John Badley, founder of the *Bedales School*, the first coeducational “new school” in England,
- W.B. Curry, since 1931 headmaster of the largest alternative school, namely *Dartington Hall School*, founded by Leonhard and Dorothy Elmhirst,
- Dora Russell, feminist, outstanding author, and founder (with husband Bertrand Russell) and head of *Beacon Hill School*,
- Beatrice Baker, head of *Badminton School*, a progressive girls’ school,
- C.H.C. Sharp, head of *Abbotsholme School*, the first “new school” in England, founded in 1889 by Cecil Reddie and model for the German *Landerziehungsheime* (rural boarding schools),
- V. Hyett, co-head of the *King Alfred School* in London, which in the 1920s was the best-known progressive school in England,
- Paul Roberts, headmaster of *Frensham Heights School*, an experiment in combining school reform with extensive internal democratization,

- T.F. Coade, headmaster of *Bryanston School*, a Christian “new school” focusing on creative learning and personal freedom.

Most of these names are unfamiliar even to specialized historians of education.² Internet searching retrieves comprehensive information only on Dora Russell, wife of English philosopher Bertrand Russell, whose literary career was mainly outside the field of pedagogy. Of the 21 “modern schools” and names in Blewitt’s *Modern Schools Handbook*, only one name is still very familiar today, namely, Alexander Neill, headmaster of *Summerhill School*. Actually, Alexander Neill is far more than “familiar”; he is a central figure in international progressive education, missing in no encyclopedia of education, and his name and school call up a legend, even a mythos, that overshadows all other names in English progressive education. This would not have been expected or predicted in the 1930s. Neill was one among many in the progressive education constellation, which in contrast to the public schools was no more than a peripheral phenomenon that received a lot of publicity.

Here it is important to consider national differences and peculiarities in historiography. In Germany, Alexander Neill became one of the known, charismatic progressive educationalists listed in the encyclopedias only after 1969. In Herman Nohl’s³ standard work on progressive education, published in a first edition in 1933,⁴ Neill does not exist, which can easily be explained by the fact that Nohl was

² Recent studies of the schools and their staffs are available for Dartington Hall (De la Iglesia, 1996) and King Alfred School (Brooks, 1998).

³ Herman Nohl (1879–1960) studied history, German philology, and philosophy in Berlin and earned a doctorate with a dissertation on Socrates and the ethics of Wilhelm Dilthey. In 1908 he completed a habilitation thesis on worldviews in painting under Rudolf Eucken in Jena. In Jena Nohl had contact with the German youth movement, and after 1919, together with Heinrich Weinel and Richard Buchwald he founded the first *Volkshochschule* [adult education center]. In 1920 Nohl was called to the University of Göttingen as professor in “practical philosophy with special focus on pedagogy”, which in 1922 became a full professorship in pedagogy, which Nohl held up to 1949. In 1937 he was forced to retire, but in 1945 he was reinstated as professor of pedagogy. Nohl is the main representative of the so-called *geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* and founder of the Göttingen School of Education, which was and still is decisive influence in German pedagogy.

⁴ *Die pädagogische Bewegung in Deutschland* [History of the Educational Movement in Germany] (Nohl/Pallat, 1933, pp. 302–374). *Die pädagogische Bewegung in Deutschland und ihre Theorie*, first published in 1935, contains the original manual article plus a second article, “Theorie der Bildung”, which was also published in 1933 (ibid., pp. 3–80).

treating the “pedagogical movement” in *Germany*. However, Nohl does include John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Helen Parkhurst, Ellen Key, Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, Cecil Reddie, and William James, none of whom were protagonists in any kind of “pedagogical movement” in Germany. Why were these particular figures selected for inclusion? Why does the selection not include Neill, whose writings were certainly quite well known in the 1920s?⁵ These questions are not irrelevant; Nohl’s interpretation of the history of *Reformpädagogik* continues, 70 years later, to shape both the subsequent historiography and the utilization of historiography in the education and training of teachers.

Dewey, Montessori, Parkhurst and Reddie are perceived in a peculiar way, namely, outside of their contexts. Nohl mentions them in passing, always in service of confirming or delimiting German progressive education. Foreign authors are not presented in their own right, that is, with an account of the topics that they dealt with. Nohl cites only names and no discursive connections that would give the reader any information about the problems and theories the authors addressed. Nohl’s selection can be explained by the following: the names of international progressive education are used in an illustrative fashion and related to German issues; anything that does not fit, such as Neill’s pedagogy of freedom, Nohl simply does not mention (and probably does not even have knowledge of).

The names of John Dewey and Maria Montessori can be found in Nohl in a section that is introduced as follows (freely translated here):

No idea of German pedagogy has found as great a response abroad than the idea of the *Arbeitsschule* [work school, vocational school]. One can say that all nations are coming together in this idea, and it is interesting to observe how, upon the common ground of this idea, the various individualities, both personal and national, develop (Nohl, 2002, p. 63).

Nohl provides four examples of this export achievement of German pedagogy: Blonskij’s industrial school, the Henry Ford Trade School in Detroit, Maria Montessori’s “Children’s House” in Rome, and Helen Parkhurst’s Dalton Plan. Underlying these models were certain theories that Nohl describes as having caused ‘strong reactions in the

⁵ Neill’s first book, *A Dominie’s Log*, was published in 1915; by 1933, seven further books and numerous articles in progressive education journals had been published. It is not known whether Nohl had access to these works. Peter Petersen is known to have been part of the Neill reception in Germany; they were both members of the *New Education Fellowship* founded in 1921.

German world of education', although often 'as a muddled mess.' Nohl finds worthy of mention the theories of 'the Swiss *Ferrière*, the Belgian *Decroly*, and foremost, the American *Dewey*' (ibid., p. 64).

No citations are given for the theories, and they do not appear in the bibliography. None of these authors had written a theory of the "work school". The core of Adolphe Ferrière's *Ecole active* is not "work", as in the German work school, but rather self-activity; Ovide Decroly described reorganization of the school based upon the interests of children and not upon the principle of work; John Dewey, as is generally known, focused on the relationship between democracy and education in his theory. The authors that Nohl mentions had nothing to do with the German "work school", which went back to the middle of the 19th century, had only little to do with progressive education and cannot be seen as an influential model exported to other countries. What happens, however, when this representation is contained in a standard history of education and achieves encyclopedic status?

It is easy to retrace Nohl's strategy: Ferrière's *La loi biogénétique et l'éducation* (1910), based on his dissertation in Geneva,⁶ was translated into German in 1912 under the title of *Biogenetik und Arbeitsschule* [Biogenetics and Work School], which was merely an adaptation to German semantics and had nothing to do with what Nohl meant by "*Arbeitsschule*". By the time Nohl had collected his material for his history of progressive education, only a few essays by Decroly were available in German translation.⁷ Nohl obviously brought the didactic concept of "self-activity" into connection with the work school. Dewey was available in German translation early on, and not a single German title pointed to the idea of the "*Arbeitsschule*". But because Georg Kerschensteiner had referred to Dewey in a number of his works, Nohl assigns Dewey to the "work school movement" as well.

Dewey is thus sorted into a category, but not received, even though Nohl states explicitly that there were theories, and not just names, behind the "muddled mess". But spiritual theories like Ferrière's,⁸ empirical theories like Decroly's, and pragmatic theories like Dewey's disrupt the historiographic construction that is Nohl's

⁶ *La loi du progrès en biologie et sociologie* (1902).

⁷ Nohl did not read French educational texts, apparently.

⁸ "Spiritual" also in the sense of "esoteric"; Ferrière's concept of education is discussed in Hameline (1993).

starting point. This construction is of interest, since it supports his historiography that bases on persons and ideas, which are assigned to epochs. What in the German-speaking world is known as the *Geschichte der Pädagogik* [history of education] and continues to be a very influential genre (Oelkers, 1999) goes back to the romantic historiography at the beginning of the 19th century. Nohl utilizes this genre to form his own construction of German *Reformpädagogik*, or progressive education.

HERMAN NOHL'S HISTORY OF THE EDUCATION MOVEMENT IN GERMANY

Nohl's focus on Germany is not by chance; it was programmatic. The foreign versions of the "new education" in the early 20th century do not have the German meanings, namely, education towards *Volk* [nation] and *Gemeinschaft* [community]. For substantiating this kind of education, a powerful historiographic construction has been available right on up to today: Nohl views the "educational movement" as the striving to reestablish national unity. The primary determining influence on the movement is the *German Movement*,⁹ as Nohl's teacher Wilhelm Dilthey had put it, referring to that epoch of literature, philosophy, and the arts between 1770 and 1830 during which the foundations of a national culture, or the "German spirit" were laid. Nohl interprets the societal-cultural developments of the 19th century as dramatic cultural decline. The German spirit found no political "body", for society was ripped apart by industrialization and civilization. Only the pedagogical movements at the end of the century, among them the work school movement, attempted to recreate that unity. All of these movements, although they had completely different orientations, worked towards the same goal.

The "new education" is said to arise from criticism, not from practice, and certainly not from theory. The historiography of German *Reformpädagogik* as initiated by Nohl speaks of *Kulturkritik* [cultural criticism] or "educational criticism", that supposedly, at the end of the 19th century, gave a new direction to the educational

⁹ Wilhelm Dilthey: *Die dichterische und philosophische Bewegung in Deutschland 1770–1800* (Inaugural lecture in Basel 1867). It is of interest that Dilthey brings the term "educational movement" into close association with Prussian state education (Die deutsche Aufklärung im Staat und in der Akademie Friedrichs des Grossen, *Deutsche Rundschau* April/Mai 1901).

reform discussion, changing it forever. Triggering the new discussion were neither new theories nor practical experiments, but criticism. Cultural criticism is supposed to have made educational reforms seem necessary. Assumptions about the decadence of, or the general crisis of, culture are said to have resulted in demands for new education.

Three names are almost always mentioned in connection with *Kulturkritik*, as these thinkers are said to have been its main representatives: Paul de Lagarde, Julius Langbehn and Friedrich Nietzsche. Nohl's historiography refers only to *German* figures; *Kulturkritik* is seen as a national phenomenon of the end of the 19th century. Nohl (1933, p. 305ff.) writes that the three figures listed above had articulated a consciousness of crisis, to which, subsequently, the educational movements could respond. Cultural criticism, says Nohl, was directed at culture as a whole (ibid., p. 305); accordingly, the educational movements had to be seen as a living unity (ibid., p. 307) and thus also seen as a whole. "Educational movements" are unions of activists, who come to be known both through their writings and their practice. They articulate, Nohl writes, "new education" *in the wake of* and *in the spirit of* "cultural criticism".

He is referring to, for example,

- the rural boarding schools movement
- the art education movement
- the movement of child-centered education ["vom Kinde aus"]
- the "internal school reform" movement, in particular the work school movement
- the gymnastics and physical education movement.

All of these movements existed, under changing names and using varied terminology, and their origins, sponsors, and effects can all be demonstrated, but in fact, the numbers were not great, and their effects were not overwhelming. The term *Kulturkritik* implies a tangible and operative reality of reform, at the least a clearly distinct power of discourse, that between 1880 and 1900 left its mark intellectually on the groups mentioned and set them upon their course. They took on the "consciousness of crisis", according to Nohl, and bet on educational renewal, which was subsequently realized, *charismatically*, by the founding fathers. New education thus became one powerful movement which, in reality, it never was.

History of education is construed with a historiographic schema. This schema is taken over by Nohl's pupils, such as Wolfgang Scheibe, without the political contexts of National Socialism (Scheibe, 1944) or democracy (Scheibe, 1969) changing the schema in any fundamental way. In 1969 Scheibe listed three criteria for the validity of the concept. It allows:

- criticism of the "one-sidedness" of intellectual education that was "wholly" determined by science
- a "new" education filled with art
- "full" validity of the "irrational" side of life.

According to this, modern education must not allow itself to be dictated by science, must take irrational experience into account, foster the artistic side, and give up the claim to rationality. Therefore, *Kulturkritik* is criticism of rationalism, intellectualism, and the "scientification" of education. While this implies that all three terms refer to real trends, no proof of such trends can in fact be established.

Certainly such criticisms were brought forward throughout all of the 19th century. From Friedrich Rückert¹⁰ to Friedrich Fröbel, Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl,¹¹ Karl Christian Planck,¹² and Hugo Göring,¹³ many authors can be found that viewed "rationalism" and "scientific education" as national evils. And the reform pedagogy strategies of "turning back" education were all widespread *prior to* the cultural criticism. Experience and life were seen as standing in opposition to learning and school, more power was to be given to the

¹⁰ Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866), Orientalist in Berlin and teacher of Paul de Lagarde, was the well-known author of, among other works, *Haus- und Jahrespoesie*, which managed to connect patriotism with a child orientation.

¹¹ Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl (1823–1897) was a cultural historian and author in Munich. He directed the Bavarian National Museum from 1885 on. Riehl's *Naturgeschichte des Deutschen Volkes* [Natural history of the German nation] (1851ff.) contains all of the significant motifs of the political "reform pedagogy" in Germany.

¹² Karl Christian Planck (1819–1880) completed post-doctoral qualifications for university teaching in philosophy in 1848 in Tübingen. From 1856 he was professor at the Gymnasium in Ulm, and in 1879 he became member of the Theological Seminar in Blaubeuren. His *Das Testament eines Deutschen* [Testament of a German] was published posthumously (1881). In it, Planck formulated a theory of the educational community, which virtually all of the German progressive educationalists represented.

¹³ Hugo Göring completed his habilitation at the University of Basel (1880) with a thesis on Basedow. His book on the *Neue deutsche Schule* [New German School] (1890) describes reform pedagogy *avant la lettre*.

“irrational”, the aims were directed towards nation and community, education was conceived of on the basis of “blood and soil” [Blut und Boden], and “abstract” science was viewed as only inimical to the soul.

If the German historiography, particularly following Nohl, were accurate, then reform pedagogy would be, in theory and practice:

- a *national* phenomenon,
- the positive reaction to *nationalistic and Anti-Semitic* “cultural criticism”,
- a *backwards-looking* “throw-back”, which could appear in the guise of “modernization”,
- a unity of *national* “movements”, and
- an *original, unique* complex that had never and nowhere else appeared before.

According to this, German “reform pedagogy” had nothing, or only negatively, to do with the theoretical and social innovations of the 19th century, which are rejected wholesale. In Nohl (1933, p. 303) the 19th century is a time of complete disintegration to which education must come to the rescue. It is no accident that the point of reference is the “*inner mission*” (ibid., pp. 303/304),¹⁴ meaning a kind of pastoral “turning back”. It was to lead to a new ideal that would, it was said, “keep culture together” and lead culture back to its origins. This ideal would work to counter the “mechanization, specialization, and historization” of what had become a “soul-less” education (ibid., p. 305), or in other words, in a positive formulation, it would work to counter everything upon which the modern educational institutions were based.

Here it is interesting to note that other variants of “modern education” could be suppressed or ignored, particularly those that turn Nohl’s historiographic schema on its head, such as Wichard Lange’s¹⁵ “modern pedagogy” of 1869. Lange was a follower of Froebel; Froebel

¹⁴ This refers to Johann Hinrich Wichern’s (1808–1881) manifesto on the social pedagogic movement of the “inner mission” of 1849. In 1848, he founded the Central Committee of the Inner Mission.

¹⁵ Wichard Lange (1826–1884) was the headmaster of an urban school (Realschule) in Hamburg and the first publisher of Friedrich Froebel’s works. Following the death of Diesterweg (1866) Lange took over editorship of the *Rheinischen Blätter für Erziehung und Unterricht*, founded in 1827 and one of the leading journals for teachers in Germany in the 19th century. The article “Die Autonomie der modernen Pädagogik” is based on a lecture that Lange held in 1869 at the *Allgemeine Deutsche Lehrerversammlung* [General Teachers’ Assembly] in Kassel.

was for Nohl the central source of child-centered pedagogy, but Lange's own "modern pedagogy" is omitted, even though it was based on "natural, free development of the child", focused on learning, and posited a theory of human potentials that were to be developed "harmonically" and holistically (Lange, 1884, p. 114ff.). However, in contrast to Froebel, Nohl does not take Lange as a historiographic point of reference. It was not necessary to trace back to him, and he could be forgotten.

In order to see progressive education as more than merely a reaction *to* and essentially *against* the processes of modernization, you would have to take a different position, and it would be fundamental to take the new theories of the 19th century into consideration that grew up with and around Darwin and the emergence of the theory of evolution. It is characteristic of German educational theory that it does not move in that direction and instead holds on to its traditional (Protestant) concepts, such as "soul, spirit" [Geist] and "community", without connecting them to evolutionary theory.

In the philosophy of education, evolutionary theory also stands for abandoning Platonism. Nohl's historiography is still "Platonic", except that the "guiding ideas" were not taken from Platon's soul, but from history. History is said to have the decisive influence on the present, in the sense that it *guides* educational movements and thus assures their intrinsic soundness. This requires, of course, historical continuity, or in other words, spiritual concepts must remain effective down through the generations. Not only German historiography found it difficult to register that precisely this construction had become questionable with the 19th century, as can be shown by core concepts of education of "child", "childlike", "development", "personality", and the "education" associated with these concepts. They had to be understood, in the second half of the 19th century, in a new way, independently of ideas and, in particular, independently of the Protestant reasoning that underlay education.

DURKHEIM AND MEAD: TWO ANTI-PLATONIC HISTORIES OF EDUCATION

There are at least two versions of classical historiography of education that are not guided and constrained by Platonic convictions. One of them starts out from the history of science, and the other refers to

the history of society. What is typical of the two variants is that neither is a “history of ideas” in the old sense. For each variant there are outstanding examples, which had a decisive influence on education, but they are not found in the German-speaking realm. They are:

- George Herbert Mead: *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (1936) and
- Émile Durkheim: *L'évolution pédagogique en France* (1938) (in German translation *Die Entwicklung der Pädagogik* (1977a); in English translation, *The Evolution of Educational Thought* (1977b)).

Durkheim (1977a, p. 23) starts out from Friedrich Paulsen's *Geschichte des gelehrten Unterrichts* [History of Higher Learning] and gives an account of the development of higher education in France. The history has five main points of orientation:

- Carolingian reforms of the 8th and 9th centuries,
- emergence of the Medieval university,
- humanistic education of the Renaissance,
- influence of Jesuit scholarship on European intellectual life of the 16th and 17th centuries,
- rise of the concept of public education in the 18th century, which found realization in France with the formation of the secular public school starting in the 19th century.

In this view, the “new schools” of progressive education represented a mere episode, an episode of which Durkheim was indeed critical at the end of his life. His essay “École de demain” (Durkheim, 1916) is directed against the persisting influence of the humanistic idea of education that starts out from the unified nature of man and centers on the cult of the human personality (Durkheim, 1977a, p. 301). Precisely that had been the emphasis of reform pedagogy, for which the expression “educational cult” is quite an apt description. The focus is on the child that is supposed to be educated in accordance with its nature.¹⁶ Durkheim rebuffs that it is not possible to teach the child “human nature in general” (ibid., p. 302), nor can the child itself be seen in this way. Rousseau was in error, and thus his theory could not be the basis of reform pedagogy, as is assumed in the main up to the present (Oelkers, 2002).

¹⁶ Precisely that idea has come under criticism today (Egan, 2002).

For Durkheim, the presumed “nature of the child” contradicts the open character of human experience. He writes that once we realize the infinite variety of mental combinations that man takes from nature, we know that it is impossible to state, at any particular moment in time, the exact composition of that nature, what is made up of. For the wealth of past achievements do not allow us in any way to set the limits of future achievements and to think that the day will come when man will have reached his limits of its creative power and will be doomed to forever repeat himself (Durkheim, 1977a, p. 304). This does not mean that we should view school and teaching simply as an exercise in creative expression, as did many progressive educators at the time. The creative development of man and the plasticity of his nature is a general concept, not a school educational term. It allows us to overcome the humanistic view of nature as static, but it does not suffice as a basis for determining the syllabus in the public schools or the content of the lessons.

For Durkheim, man can no longer be viewed as a system of determinate and finite elements that would determine his nature. That view confounds nature with “essence” and thus does not take the history of cultural and social evolution into account. But it is precisely history that shows us the infinite variability of human nature (ibid., p. 303), and what it reveals is not, however, man’s “essence”. Being human must be understood as an infinitely plastic and protean potential, which under the pressure of ever-new conditions, can take on the most varied aspects (ibid., p. 304). This protean force is the ever-changing creation of self. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Proteus is the shape-changing, prophetic old man of the sea able to take on various forms at will; he reveals his prophecies only to those who are clever enough to hold him fast in one of his many forms.

Émile Durkheim¹⁷ was the first professor of education in France, being given this appointment at the University of Bordeaux in 1887 at

¹⁷ Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) was born into a Jewish family in Epinal in and completed his baccalauréat at the Collège d’Epinal. He studied in Paris at the École Supérieure Normale and began teaching philosophy in 1882. He was called to Bordeaux in 1887, where he taught up to 1902. Durkheim founded the first social science journal in France, *Année sociologique*, in 1898. At the Sorbonne from 1902, Durkheim was one of the most influential teachers, and his lecture courses were the only required courses for students seeking degrees in philosophy, history, literature, and languages. In addition, he was responsible for the education of a whole generation of French schoolteachers, in whom he instilled a rationalist, anti-metaphysical pedagogy, which differed radically from German pedagogy.

the age of 27.¹⁸ In Bordeaux, up until his call to the Sorbonne, he held lectures for fifteen years on moral education, practical education, applied psychology, education of the intelligence, or intellectual education, whereby we know of only one historical lecture course, which dealt with education of the 19th century. In 1902 Durkheim began teaching at the Sorbonne in Paris and in 1916 was made professor and given the chair of Science of Education, which would be renamed “Science of Education and Sociology” in 1913. It was here that he gave his lectures on the *Histoire des doctrines pédagogiques*, upon which Maurice Halbwachs, as editor, based its publication in 1938 (Durkheim, 1938).

Durkheim was a graduate of the *École Normale Supérieure*. His generation at the *École* included the socialist republican Jean Jaurès, the philosopher Henri Bergson, and the historian Camille Jullian. Durkheim’s ideas on man’s creative adaptation are strongly reminiscent of Bergson’s theory of *évolution créatrice*, which was published in 1907 in Paris. Although Durkheim distanced himself sharply from Bergson’s “irrationalism”, he in fact held a similar view that has to do with applying evolutionary theory to culture and society. At the core, every development is creative, because and insofar as planned creation can no longer be assumed and, at the same time, the idea of history as a paradox reservoir of timeless, universal experience has to be rejected.

Durkheim (1889) reviewed the first edition of Ferdinand Tönnies’s book *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* for the *Revue philosophique* in 1889.¹⁹ He criticized the typological contrasting of “community” and “society” and called it untenable. Society is *one*, which cannot be divided into two social worlds of completely different types. It is also of interest that Durkheim, who was a prolific reviewer, took notice of the educational use of the German ideology of “Volksgemeinschaft” (community of the people) based on Tönnies book only during the

¹⁸ In 1882 the University at Bordeaux had established the first course in pedagogy in France for prospective schoolteachers. It was first taught by Alfred Epinas and then by Durkheim from 1887. Durkheim was appointed as *Chargé d’un cours de science sociale et de pédagogie*. In addition to this primary responsibility, he also taught a public lecture course in social science every Saturday morning, devoting his lectures to special topics ranging, for example, from social solidarity to changes in the family to ethnology of tribal societies. Durkheim wrote some of his major works at Bordeaux, including *De la division du travail social* (1893), *Les règles de la méthode sociologique* (1895), and *Le suicide: étude de sociologie* (1897).

¹⁹ The review was published in English translation in 1972 (Durkheim, 1972).

First World War (Durkheim, 1915) and criticized it using arguments similar to John Dewey's *German Philosophy and Politics* of the same year. The rapidly growing body of international literature on progressive education after 1890 is practically absent in Durkheim's reviews. In contrast, he followed very closely the development of the philosophy of Pragmatism (Durkheim, 1955).²⁰

Modern science is research science, writes George Herbert Mead in *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*,²¹ and that raises problems for traditional philosophy, calling its concepts and doctrines into question. Research science is hypothetical learning; concepts must be tested and cannot be assured; theories are not dogmas, but rather temporary working hypotheses in the light of existent, present experiences and facts. This means that every postulate can turn into a problem; all assumptions are valid only "from the point of view of the science of the time" (Mead, 1936, p. 265).²²

Scientific inquiry in this sense begins with the Renaissance and finally gains ascendancy in the 19th century. The consequences for philosophy are grave: "truth" is now a "working" truth that is temporal and transitory; the traditional concept of "being" becomes history; and "society" can no longer be understood on the basis of feudal theories. Philosophy can interpret scientific results (*ibid.*, p. 343), but it can neither replace them nor offer alternatives to them. One solution to this situation, says Mead, was Pragmatism as developed by William James and John Dewey (*ibid.*, p. 344f.). One of its central insights relates to the theory of scientific experimental or

²⁰ *Pragmatisme et sociologie* was the title of a lecture that Durkheim held at Sorbonne in 1913/1914. It was published in an edited volume in 1955 based on students' lecture notes.

²¹ *Movements of Thought*, published after Mead's death, is based for the most part on stenographic notes from Mead's lectures for undergraduate students at the University of Chicago, which Mead had never prepared for publication. Mead held his lecture on *Movements of Thought in the 19th Century* 19 times between the summer of 1901 and spring 1930 (Lewis/Smith, 1980, App. 1, 2). His keen historical interest found its roots in Wilhelm Dilthey's lectures on the "History of Philosophy", which he attended in Berlin in the summer semester of 1891. In the winter semester of 1890/91 Mead also attended Friedrich Paulsen's lectures on education. Mead studied in Leipzig and Berlin from 1888 to 1891.

²² "Science starts with certain postulates, but does not assume they are not to be touched. There is no phase of the world as we know it in which a problem may not arise, and the scientist is anxious to find such a problem. He is interested not merely in giving a systematic view of the world from a science already established but in working out problems that arise. This is the attitude of research science" (Mead, 1936, pp. 265–266).

hypothetical learning, which Mead expands to develop a general model of education (Biesta, 1998; see also Tröhler/Oelkers, 2004).

“Research science” and “education” are not two separate areas. They both refer to an identical experience. Pragmatism calls upon two sources:

“The sources of the pragmatic doctrine are these: one is *behavioristic psychology*, which enables one to put intelligence in its proper place within the conduct of form, and to state that intelligence in terms of the activity of the form itself; the other is the *research process*, the scientific technique, which comes back to the testing of a hypothesis by its working ... If we connect these two by recognizing that the testing in its working-out means the setting-free of inhibited acts and processes, we can see that both of them lead up to ... a doctrine ..., and that perhaps the most important phase of it is this: that the process of knowing lies inside of the process of conduct” (Mead, 1936, pp. 351–352; italics J.O.).

For this reason, writes Mead, pragmatism has been spoken of as a practical sort of philosophy, a sort of “bread-and-butter philosophy” (ibid., p. 352). It does not distinguish between thought and being or between knowledge and action; “it brings the process of thought, of knowledge, inside of conduct” (ibid., p. 352).

The theory is warranted on the basis of the research process or learning through hypotheses on the one hand, and on the psychology of Behaviorism as understood by John Dewey and William James (ibid., p. 392ff.) on the other.²³ This is not John Watson’s theory of conditioned learning based on his “behaviorist manifesto” of 1913,²⁴ but rather a theory of intelligent adaptation that sees experience as a temporal sequence (ibid., p. 392) and consciousness as emerging from public communication, without rigorously rejecting intentionality (ibid., p. 399ff.).²⁵

One of the main influences on the development of Pragmatism was the shift in the nature of work in the rapidly developing industrial society. The growing division of labor was concurrent with the pro-

²³ Starting with: William James (1884). On Some Omissions of Introspective Psychology. *Mind* 9, 1–26.

²⁴ John B. Watson (1913). Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It. *Psychological Review* 20, 157–177. Watson’s manifesto was based on animal psychology of the 19th century as well as on experimental psychology as represented, for example, by the work of James Baldwin.

²⁵ The space about us is public, while intentions are private: “The intent which the person has is not evident to the other person. He may make a guess at it, but it is only the person ... who knows definitely what he intends to do” (Mead, 1936, p. 401).

cesses of urbanization and the attendant new formation of the public consciousness. It was only in the modern city that the individual could free himself from feudal control, as a day laborer receiving money in return for his services. The wage belonged to him in terms of his own effort, under no feudal conditions at all (ibid., p. 175). With the city, new forms of social control had to be built up (ibid., p. 176) that could be neither feudal nor ecclesiastical. This description had its roots essentially in Georg Simmel's *Philosophie des Geldes*²⁶ which Mead had reviewed in the 1900/1901 volume of the *Journal of Political Economy*. In that work, Simmel (1989, p. 379ff.) had laid out how the historical departure from an agrarian economy and the manorial system brought with it the "freeing of the individual" (ibid., p. 138) under the conditions of the "general existence of the city" (ibid., p. 596).

For Simmel, fundamental to the public forms of the urban existence is individual and social "differentiation" (ibid., p. 631). The classical view of society, as a closed entity or "body" that incorporates individuals in a lasting grip, no longer holds. We can also no longer view individuals as ultimate, indivisible "monads" that are untouched by the process of their experience. Simmel sees social differentiation as both spatial and temporal; it occurs both in coexistence and in succession (ibid., p. 369), which can be observed in the phenomena of the division of labor and in fashions.

Similarly, Mead holds that the gradual and continuous emergence of capitalistic industrial society fundamentally changed the social situation. Society, and thus education, can no longer be understood according to the pattern of the "ancient house" (Mead, 1936, p. 185), meaning closed and static. Social dynamics entered not only with industry, but also with the modern economy oriented towards an unlimited market. The new "economic community" of the 19th century was more universal than any church, and it had no need for metaphysical justifications (ibid., pp. 187/188). "Also, it brought together people who were separated nationally, in language, in customs" (ibid., p. 188).

"Society", however, is not the same thing as "market". In contrast to Malthus, Mead makes it clear that freedom of exchange is not

²⁶ The first edition was published in 1900 by Duncker & Humblot, Leipzig; a second expanded edition appeared in 1907. An English translation was published in 1990, co-translated by David Frisby (*The Philosophy of Money*, second edition, New York: Routledge, 1995). One of the main chapters was published in English as early as 1900.

based on “natural laws” of economy. Work and capital do not follow the simple tendencies of unceasing growth of wealth as well as increasing impoverishment, but instead must be seen upon the background of increasing differentiation and ongoing problem solving (ibid., p. 194ff.). “Societies develop ... by adjusting themselves to the problems they find before them” (ibid., pp. 365/366). Social adaptation is always intelligent adaptation and therefore a process of continuous learning.

“When we reach the human form with its capacity for indicating what is important in a situation, through the process of analysis; when we get to the position in which a mind can arise in the individual form, that is, where the individual can come back upon himself and stimulate himself just as he stimulates others; where the individual can call out in himself the attitude of the whole group; where he can acquire the knowledge that belongs to the whole community; where he can respond as the whole community responds under certain conditions when they direct this organized intelligence toward particular end; then we have this process which provides solutions for problems working in a self-conscious way” (ibid., p. 366).

Mead is trying to connect the entire evolutionary process with social organization (ibid., p. 372) and adaptation with intelligence.²⁷ Modern society requires intelligent forms of social control that must go beyond simple historical habits and patterns. Society is thus cooperation, which is to be understood as a highly complex activity based upon humans’ ability to take the attitude of the group to which they belong, and it is not merely based upon gain or loss (ibid., p. 375). “Thinking” refers to “public consideration”; “it is taking the attitude of others, talking to other people, and then replying in their language. That is what constitutes thinking” (ibid., pp. 375/ 376).²⁸

This is the point where the theory of education must begin, meaning that it must be linked with social theory, without relying on past history. In the process of societal differentiation, tradition of education loses its normative power. History is past solutions; it may yield suggestions, but it cannot be understood as a binding tradition and utilized for politization strategies. It offers no assurance, reveals no final truths. Instead, history must be understood as an open research problem. The German type of *Geschichte der Pädagogik* (history of pedagogy) is final in character. It is not tenable in the face of the information and knowledge that we have today nor does it stand up to post-Platonic theories of development. We have no other choice than

²⁷ The basic idea of “general intelligence” has its roots in animal psychology of the 19th century.

²⁸ On the construction of the social mind, compare Valsiner/Veer (2000).

to rewrite the history of education again and again and to put the process of selection in historiography on as rational a basis as possible.

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